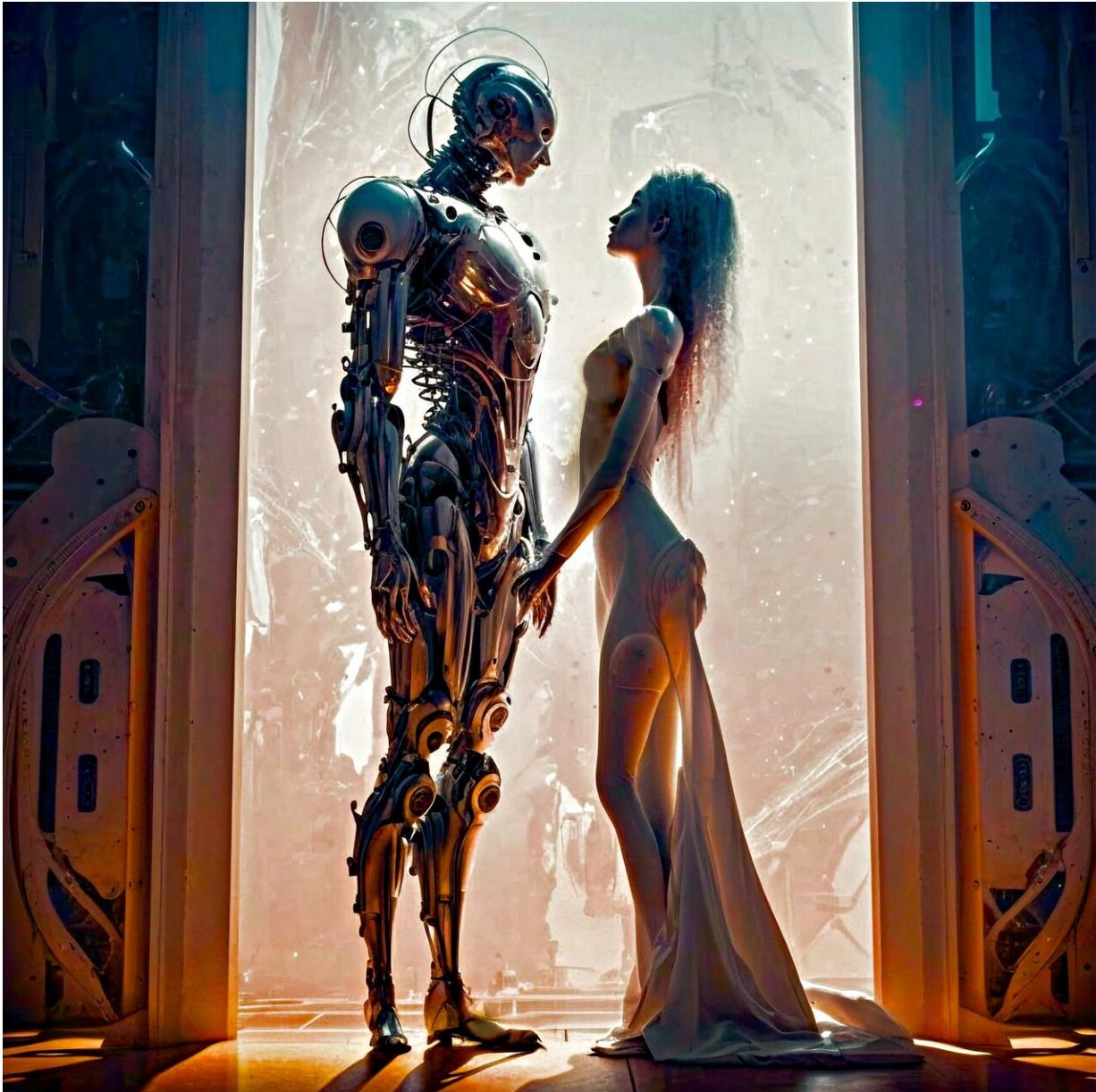


# Robots are coming for your love life

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Credit: Pixabay/CC0 Public Domain

A new digital matchmaker in town promises to offer less, not more, in the online dating swipescape and will charge users \$111 monthly for it.

Its 2023 market proposition? Artificial intelligence, of course.

Under a premium membership-based model, Teleport aims to stoke romance and take a chunk of the \$4.6 billion dating app market, using an AI matchmaker that learns from a user's every activity—including which of five daily profiles they view, to whom they send messages and feedback given about dates they go on. They'll be provided three optimized matches per week, but be able to message with only one.

"Thinking back to my experiences—just the number of people that you match with, you maybe talk to 10 of them, you maybe go on two dates," says Bruna Petrillo, the director of memberships at Teleport. "It's really not designed for meeting a person. It's not designed for actual success. It's designed for this paradox of choice."

As for the price point, founder Chad Goodman, a dating-app veteran who previously launched the dating apps Lucid and Firstdate, stresses that paying for the product weeds out those who are serious about connection from those who aren't, and it holds the company accountable. "We exist to find you your person," he says.

The dating-app market has nearly tripled from 2015 to 2021, according to the Business of Apps, with an active user base of 323 million. Just over one in three people on dating apps ever paid to use a service, according to a survey by Pew Research Center published in February. People in upper-income brackets are more likely to pay for apps than their lower-income counterparts; men and those aged at least 30 are also likelier to pay.

Category behemoth Match Group Inc. reported that 16.1 million [users](#) had paid for a subscription, an on-demand purchase or both in 2022, roughly on par with the previous year, across its portfolio of brands including Tinder, Hinge, OKCupid, Plenty Of Fish and its flagship, Match.

Teleport's membership will be capped at 5,000 paid members when the app launches on June 1 in New York. The League, which was acquired last year by Match Group for about \$30 million and positions itself as the dating app for "academically elite" people (as in Ivy League), tried a similarly capped, invite-only strategy when it first debuted in 2014. It now offers a free entry-level tier in which "guests" get a more limited user experience.

Teleport has raised \$6 million from Dragonfly Capitol Partners, Buckley Ventures and other investors over two rounds and plans to expand the service to Los Angeles and Miami, as well as establish additional membership tiers that offer one-on-one coaching. (Goodman declined to say how much those tiers might cost.)

A group of 44 founding members is allowed to refer friends and acquaintances for potential membership, building a "collective" of people across gender identities and sexual orientations. The app's limits on the dating pool, as well as on the number of profiles served daily, is meant to encourage engagement rather than mindless swiping.

That swiping habit, while instantly recognizable from the dating-app era, is actually detrimental to a user's experience: Rather than serving as a numbers game, a study by researchers at the University of Vienna found that "excessive swiping" worsens a person's fear of never finding love and burdens users with option overload.

Tinder, the ne plus ultra of swipe culture, first launched in 2012 and

maintains the greatest market share in the dating-app industry. Over the years, apps have tried to differentiate themselves via function and price, with premium-tier subscriptions promising to cut through noise.

Bumble mandates that women message first when seeking opposite-sex pairings, and offers a premium tier starting at \$20 per week; it also offers options for friendship matches and career networking. Apps such as Motto and Lex center on LGBTQ relationships, while the elusive Raya positions itself as an app for industry shakers and headline names. A host of additional apps target religious backgrounds, exercise enthusiasts, farmers, tall people, even some who want friendships set up for them.

Amy Nobile, a New York-based dating coach, says daters need intentionality, not more apps. She recommends that her clients pay for app subscriptions if they offer profiles, a cost that comes on top of her \$25,000 fee for a four-month program that includes coaching people through [dating apps](#).

"Unfortunately, we're sort of tied to some of these algorithms, so in order to see who's liked you, you do have to upgrade," she says. "The issue is: We're skeptical as consumers, as customers, as people just looking for love."

Hinge, which also uses machine learning to present users with a person it labels their "most compatible" match, launched a \$50 monthly membership tier in February for "highly-motivated" users who want to be spotlighted above others on the app. Meanwhile, as of January, the League's VIP tier cost \$2,500 per month (or \$1,000 per week) and allows users to see likes, match with people instantly and hide their age, among other features beyond a more limited \$100 per week option. And Tinder is testing out a \$500-per-month option, which Bernard Kim, Match Group's chief executive officer, cited as an "ultra-premium

subscription tier" on the company's fourth-quarter 2022 earnings call.

Users who aren't shelling out for amplified features often complain on [social media](#) about increasingly expensive prices and that apps keep better matches behind a paywall as an incentive to upgrade. Others are skeptical as to whether boosted exposures and other premium features would make a material difference in the hunt for companionship.

Nobile, the dating coach, says the COVID-19 pandemic forced people to prioritize what "truly matters ... love."

"While things like money and career success used to be a top priority, now it's all about finding 'the one'—no matter the cost," says Nobile.

Teleport founder Goodman says the app's AI is able to perform matchmaking at scale for its members, who will need to pay for at least three months of membership to begin. This, he says, will allow the algorithm to learn what people are looking for and ultimately to find a long-term connection that outlasts the investment period. The company has hosted in-person events both to expand the wait list and help people meet others in real life.

"These people are serious about finding their person and are joining Teleport with a certain level of intentionality around that," Goodman says of the app's founding members and their circle of influence. "The future of meeting people isn't a dating app, it's matchmaking."

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